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EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL COUNSELORS EMPOWERING MINOR REFUGEES IN KIVELAHTI FAMILY GROUP HOME

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EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL COUNSELORS EMPOWERING MINOR
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Abstract

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The topic for the thesis was chosen through an interest in promoting an ideal living environment for minor refugees. The study is based on social counsellor's experiences describing what an ideal working environment would be for minor refugees living in Kivenlahti family group home. The themes in the interviews were safety and security, social skills, developing networks and professional development.

Qualitative Research Method was used, using themed interviews. Six social counsellors working at Kivenlahti Family Group Home took part in the individual interviews which were done in English and Finnish language. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the data and theory content was considered during the analysis.

The conclusions drawn from the findings, shows that most workers in Kivenlahti have had working experiences in social work areas, and observed that the minors have the need for safety and security, of which the home provides but the minors security in the public is not guaranteed. Despite the fact that most of the informants described their job as routine, and one that has no specific formula, they considered training as an important means of improving their professional skills. One possible way to keep the minors safe is by educating the public on issues that regard minors and immigrants and also integrating the minors through schools so that they will feel part of the society and gain their own independence.

Key Words: social work, empowerment and multicultural counselling.

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1. Introduction

In recent times the number of minor refugees has increased rapidly. The International Committee of the Red Cross ICRC (2004, 12) describes a minor refugee as a child under the age of 18 who has been separated from both parents and who is not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. These minors are vulnerable to abuse as they travel from war torn countries to seek asylum. Such risks demand that the receiving states to take special measures to ensure their care and protection. According to the statistics from the Finnish Immigration Services there were 106 applicants in the year 2006. The number increased drastically in the year 2008 with 708 minor refugees applying. The number decreased in 2009 to 557. ICRC (2004, 12)

The centers for asylum seekers are specialized for minors. The centers have group homes and well trained staff to attend to the minors. The minors upon arrival at the reception centers are located a social counselor and a representative in charge of their wellbeing. This is because the UNHCR (2005) claims that a child is child regardless of his background, therefore they need special attention. The social counselor has the responsibility of promoting the rights and the best interest of the minor during the asylum process. UNHCR2 (2005)

Majority of the minor refugees coming to Finland are from Somali, Iraq and Afghanistan. Many flee from their countries due to reasons such as wars, domestic violence, threats and fear of being persecuted. According to (www.migri.fi) statistics, there are 24 units established for hosting minors, located throughout Finland. The group family home has a duty of ensuring that the minor refugees have a suitable care and accommodation, receives proper education, health provision, financial support and receive language support.

The study is based on social work, empowerment and multicultural counselling. Themed interviews and open-ended questions were used to collect data.. The purpose of this thesis was to explore social counsellor's experiences as an important aspect in the minor refugees' lives and to improve the support for minor refugees. The aim of the study was to bring out certain elements and concepts which can help create a better understanding of the lives of minor's.

2. Background

The Bachelor thesis is a part of Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Otaniemi Unit Project, 'Empowering Work and Development Path'. Having done my second placement in Kivenlahti family group home, I developed an interest in minors and the experiences of social counsellors in supporting the integration process of the minors in Finland.

Kivenlahti Family Group Home is located in Espoo. It is located on an Espoo City rental building in Mervita 8a, 02320 Espoo and it aims at providing shelter for adolescent minor refugees. The group home was built with the purpose of integrating minor refugees into the Finnish society. They provide basic necessities to minors and provide them with skills to cope in the Finnish society. They offer information as well as practical help on integration matters, education, work and leisure. The home has a vision of improving the wellbeing of clients, multiculturalism and networking with other organisation. Kivenlahden, Perheenryhmäkoti (2007, 34)

Kivenlahti family group was established in 1995 with 8 available places for minors within the age of 13-17yrs. The minors live in the home until they are 18yrs old. It is a branch of Espoo group family home (RYPE), which has another separate branch in Ingas Group Home Espoo. The family group home was built with the objective of integrating minor refugees into the Finnish society by encouraging minors to study, work and get involved in hobbies they enjoy, the minors are also given an opportunity to practice their culture and practice their beliefs and religions. Kivenlahden, Perheenryhmäkoti (2007, 37)

Kivenlahti family home has one manager and 7 social counsellors who form a multicultural work team. All the staff has previous experiences in social work fields. Staff meetings are held once a week. The manager holds evaluation meetings with individual members of staff where they draw up a strategic working plan for the worker. The home organises work development workshop every 3 weeks present are the counsellors and the manager. Every counsellor on duty has a responsibility of recording the on goings of the day in the information system where all other workers can assess it for future reference. Kivenlahden, Perheenryhmäkoti (2007,50)

The Finnish system processes all minor refugees through the bureaucratic pipeline in a similar manner, regardless of their past experiences. The main partners of Kivenlahti family home include, The Ministry of Interior (MOI) is the decision making body for all issues that pertains immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and minor refugees. Located under the Ministry is the Directorate of Immigration (UVI), which deals with the processing of each application for asylum. The UVI coordinates its efforts with the Finnish Border Guard and Police, which are most likely to be the Finnish agencies a child will first encounter.

The Ministry of Labour (MOL) is responsible for the reception and accommodation of refugees and asylum seekers. They uphold the laws and implement the decisions set forth by the MOL. Under it is the EEDC Employment and Economic Development Centres, which ensures that all municipalities carry out their responsibilities in accordance with established rules and regulations. They are also in charge of the group homes and family group homes where minor refugees reside. Each minor is appointed a representative by the group home as soon as they arrive to Finland, their main role is to protect the best interest of the minor refugee and act with Power of Attorney during the decision-making process.

The Employment Offices are local bodies which are responsible for integrating minors and devising personal integration plans. The NGOs also referred to as 'the third sector' include, The Finnish Red Cross which offers a variety of service to refugees, their work include family tracing, basic integration courses, and a variety of class and leisure activities. The Refugee advice Centre is the primary authority on children's legal issues. They maintain a close relationship with the UVI and the MOI to ensure cooperation concerning the needs of children. They are also responsible for training the legal representatives for each minor refugee. Kivenlahden, Perheenryhmäkoti (2007)

3. Previous research on minor refugees

Daniel Osei KariKari, in his Degree thesis coping of unaccompanied refugees, explored the needs of minor refugees from the minor's point of view. Alitolppa-Niitamo has published various articles on these topics and her dissertation (2004) was entitled, 'The Icebreaker: Somali speaking youth in Metropolitan Helsinki, with a focus on the context of Formal Education.' Alitolppa-Niitamo (2004).

These writers have done a good work in providing understanding for the state of affairs for minor refugees; I have chosen to explore components that previous works have not addressed. This thesis seeks to answer the question, social counsellor's ability to support minor refugees needs through their daily encounter with them. The research uses qualitative research method to explore this issue that is crucial in the lives of minors' refugees in Finland.

4. Theoretical framework

This study was based on empowerment, social work and multicultural counselling. Other literatures were also used in the analysis of this study. The key concepts of this study are empowerment, social work theories, multicultural counselling and minor refugees living in Kivenlahti family group home.

4.1 Social work

Social work is a profession that works towards the attainment and pursuit of social change and the betterment of individuals. Social work uses scientific approaches in solving and developing new processes in helping clients. Okitikpi and Aymer (2008,3). In their attempt to empower minors social counsellors are faced with various decisions that they have to make, and in making this decision, they have to use some set processes and procedures in their work.

Fields of social work has revolutionized over the years. Some of the fields of social work are child protection, community work, services for families, elderly people and community care, disabled people, mental health, adult offenders just to mention a few. The history of social work shows a clear connection between social work as a profession and the social movements of time. Social work derived its main impulse from women's movement prior to World War I. The church has also played a significant role in the development of social work. Throughout Europe, Catholic and Protestant organisations were active in the founding of institutions for social work education. At the end of the medieval period, poor persons in society were seen

as obstacles capable of destroying the social order. In order to curtail their influence on the social order, the state arranged systems that would care for them. Hill (1991,17)

In England, a law known as 'The poor law' served the purpose of helping poor people. The law divided poor people into able body, impotent and idle poor and the aid of these divisions was to serve them well. In the end of the 19th century, social work was practised in the form of alms giving and the rehabilitation of the poor. They identified the most deserving of charity and used registration to ensure provisions were not duplicated by participating agencies. During the early years of social work practice, there was a close connection between the organised workers' movement and social work in many parts of Europe. Legally mandated social services seem to have a particular strong impact both on social work practice and education. Hill,(1991:94).

There are different work models used by social workers in their day to day work. These models include, Psychoanalytic models which emphasizes on the historical factors, such as background of a client, uncovering unresolved conflicts from the past which continue to attach themselves to individual members of the family and their current situation. The role of a social worker here is to the client's family patterns and focus on how members feel about each other. Structural models focuses on change, change in the way that a family's members deal with each other 'here and now'. The worker joins the system to see how it works, to avoid being unable to withdraw from time to time, strategies have been devised to prevent getting too drawn in. These might be having a co-worker in the room or linked by audio/video facilities, physically withdrawing at intervals helps, as does leaving fairly long intervals of two or three weeks between interviews. The goal is to restructure the family's organization so as to change unhelpful patterns of relating to one another.

Strategic models focuses on the present. The hypothesis is that current problems or symptoms are being maintained by on-going, repetitive sequences of interaction between family members. The clients who go to agencies do so because of change, either one that has taken place or one that is in prospect. What families need is workers who expect change, seeing it not only as possible, but inevitable. Noting strengths and family cooperation is preferred to noting the pathology of resistance; indeed, we ourselves may be what is producing the resistance, failing to match what the family need with what we have to offer. Behavioural models emphasizes on what is happening in the present, focusing on interpersonal/environmental factors which are 'rewarding', that is maintaining behaviour pattern. 'Practice theory 'is what social workers do and how they make sense of their experiences. Coulshed.V & Orme (1998).

The primary goal of social work is to help clients manage their problems in living more effectively and develop life-enhancing unused opportunities more fully. Although social workers help clients achieve valued outcomes, they do not control those outcomes directly.

In the end clients may choose to live more effectively or not. Egan,(2006). The role of a social worker is to help a client become effective in developing contingency plans, discover resources that will enable them to begin acting, to persist, and to accomplish their goals. In addition, they help clients find the incentives and the regards they need to persevere in action, acquire the skills to act and to sustain goal accomplishing action, develop a social support and challenge system in their day-to-day live, prepare clients to get along without a helper, spot and help clients deal with the 'false-hope' syndrome.

4.2 Empowerment

Thompson (1997, 156) quotes that empowerment 'is not a technique but a goal and a process. As a goal it will not be reached overnight, just as the oppressive conditions within our current social order did not suddenly appear. The process of empowerment is an on-going one and it follows the major premise that people are not objects that should be exploited, controlled or oppressed but instead we should view people as subjects. 'with inherent dignity and with that should not be conditioned on race, gender,, class or any other characteristic. Thompson (1997;76).The degree to which empowerment can be implemented in social work practice is influenced by several factors. individual beliefs, educational experiences about caring, appreciation of one's work as a social worker and one's own experiences in caring for others or being cared for. Other factors include administrative support for social workers and the environment where care takes place. Holden, (1991).

The position of the social worker in the empowerment process is that of a facilitator and as someone who walks side by side with the client. The worker-client relationship is a special relationship because it is created by the client's need for care. Social workers are obligated to exercise professional social workers behaviours towards their clients to promote their wellbeing. Smerke, (1990).

The empowerment process is an on-going process used by social workers as a systematic, individualized way to fulfil a specific goal. The worker and the client work together as partners in a relationship built on trust and directed towards maximizing the client's strength and maintaining his or her integrity. Empowerment programs are designed to achieve positive results such as education, health, social welfare and so on in the lives of those affected by the programs. For improvement to occur in a client's life, there has to be honesty, meaning the limitations that the client is facing are discussed in an honest manner, this help to build the client- partner relationship, and may involve documentation of a client's progress, hence the process of achieving the desired outcome. Fetterman and wandersmand, (2005,31)

Barnes & Walker 1996, identified one of the principles that should govern good practice as follows, 'empowerment should enable personal development as well as increasing influence over service. Both the client and the social worker should benefit from the service provided.

Social counselors function well as professional persons when they know and understand different cultures in relation to their experience, human conditions, cultural care values and beliefs. Social advisors should be culturally prepared to be effective and beneficial to their clients. They should guide their members thinking and actions by sharing essential information with the clients. Social counselors as empowerers recognize that there are basic social inequalities in society and strive to eliminate these conditions by helping people use programs so that social conditions and communities are positively impacted in the process. As people become more confident, self-determined, and ready to take control of their lives, they are better able to confront inequalities in their lives.

A commitment to social justice involves helping individuals develop their capacity for intelligent judgment and action by supplying them with methods, tools, techniques and training to improve their programs through the use of empowerment. Community knowledge embraces local community knowledge and posits that people typically know their own problems and is in a good position to generate their own solutions. Empowerment involves making the client's knowledge explicit so that it can be shared through communicative action and synthesized to create new knowledge. Fatterman & Abraham, (2005, 34).

It is unlikely for an individual to complete the decision-making process alone. Social workers should support each other in decision-making concerning the care of clients, their own work capacity and professional development. Complex problems often require complex solutions. The time is past when a single profession or practice model can provide the help needed by many of the clients

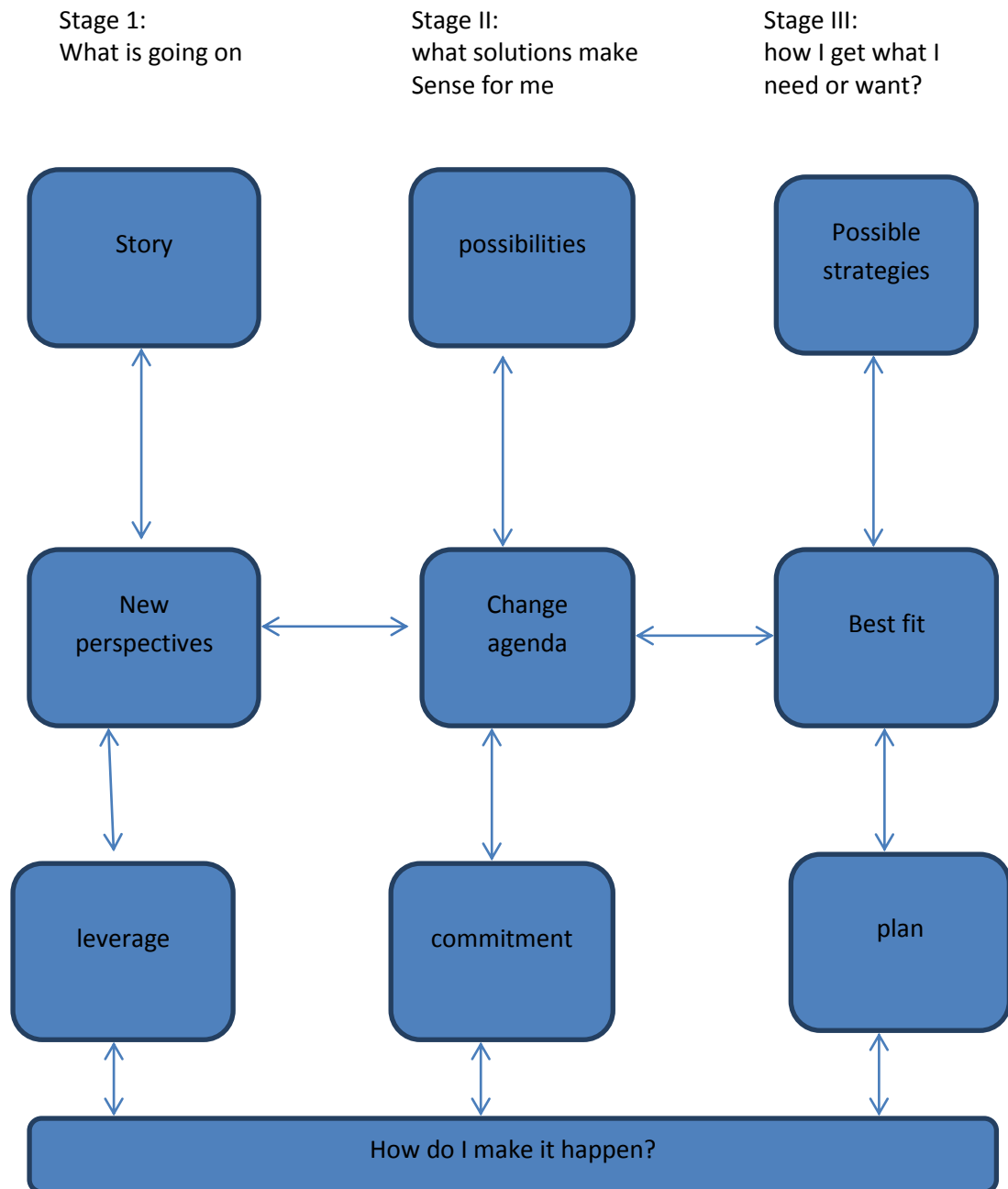
4.3 Multicultural counseling

Kivenlahti uses multicultural counseling as a working tool because the clients and staff are multicultural. Multiculturalism has done a lot of help in the history of social work because it has assisted them to handle situations that are related to cultural, ethnic and religious themes. Social workers who have never had the opportunity to deal face to face with people from multicultural background could find it easy to handle cases that are related to cultures. Ponterotto et al. (2007) argued that cultural identity affects who and what a person is. However, individuals change with time, therefore the meaning of culture alters together with them. People also change after interacting with other culturally diverse individuals. Ponterotto et al, (2007).

Counseling can be defined as a profession that aims at helping an individual to function independently in the society while promoting human wellbeing. Counselors can help clients understand themselves, their problem situations, and their unused opportunities with a view to managing them effectively. Through the following interrelated tasks such as helping the

clients tell their stories, develop new perspectives, reframe their stories and achieve leverage by working on issues that make a difference. Egan (2006, 169).

Figure I: The counseling model.



Multicultural counseling concentrates on cultural issues. It encourages the counselors to not only look at the individual issues of the client but also examine their multicultural content, as well as environment of each client.

The social counselors use multicultural counseling as a tool to help the minor refugees holistically. The minor refugees have ethnically diverse backgrounds, and need help in various life situations. While counseling minor refugees it is important, for the counselor to understand of how the minor is affected by the cultural diversity that they find in Finland. The counselor should have an understanding of how individuals construct their worldview, basic attitudes, values and norms. Skillful counseling is to have a bound and holistic understanding of the process that individuals go through because of cultural differences they are surrounding.

5. Conducting the study

5.1 Purpose of the study and research question

The purpose of the study was to explore social counsellor's experiences as an important aspect in the client's lives and to improve the support for minor refugees.

What are the social counsellor's experiences in identifying minors' needs and what are the ways in which they support those needs?

5.2 Research method

Qualitative research is used in the social science field to help researchers study cultural and social occurrences. It is designed with the idea in mind of understanding people and the social and cultural contexts in which they live. According to Kaplan & Maxwell, the motivation of doing qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, comes from the observation that, if there is one thing which distinguishes humans from the natural world, it is our ability to talk! With this understanding it is argued that the participants point of view and the social context involved is lost when information is quantified. Kaplan & Maxwell(1994),

In this thesis qualitative approach was used to study and analyse data by using thematic analysis which seeks to build knowledge about the meaning or relevance of a particular phenomenon or concept when little is known. It allows for the construction of general themes based on specific data resulting from the findings. Nieswiadomy,(1998). The strength of qualitative data rests very centrally on the competence with which their analysis is carried out. Miles, (1999).

Qualitative research relies on transforming information from observations, reports and recordings into data in written form. It relies on a detailed and intricate description of events or people, as it is known, it is necessary in order to convey the complexity of the situation and to provide the reader with sufficient detail to make his own judgement whether the researcher's interpretation of the phenomena is justifiable and relevant for other circumstances. Qualitative research method was chosen in this thesis since it tends to be loosely structured, permitting subject's full opportunity to express themselves and behave in naturalistic way.

Themed Interviews involves a set of assumption and understanding about the situation which are not normally associated with a casual conversation. Descombe(2004,163). The researcher has only one person's ideas to grasp and interrogate, and one person to guide through the interview agenda. It is possible to obtain a wider range of answers, which is beneficial, especially if something surprising is in question. The interviewing method also allows accuracy and allows respondents to answer questions in a relaxed way and thus give them the opportunity to build rapport with the interviewers and spontaneously reveal information they might have withheld under different circumstances. Morris & Andus,(2001). During the interview, probing was used to dig deeper into a topic rather than let the discussion flow onto the next point. An informant may make a point in passing which the researcher thinks should be explored in more details. the interviewee may be asked to explain further or justify a comment. Descombe(2004, 178)

Interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to check that he or she has understood the informant correctly. As an on-going part of the normal talk during interviews, the researcher can present a summary of what he or she thinks the informant has said, which the information can then confirm as an accurate understanding, or can be corrected if felt to be a misunderstanding, of what has been said. Such checks can be used at strategic points during the interview as a way of concluding discussions on an aspect of the topic. Descombe(2004,78). By tape recording the interview, it allowed the possibility to concentrate on what is being said and its permanent nature captures the whole conversation, as well as the tone of voice.

5.3 The informants

A purposive sample research uses a specific knowledge about a certain group of people in order to find a suitable representative of that group. Berg,(2007,44) The possibility of getting in touch with appropriate informants for the thesis was discussed with the manager of Kivenlahti family group home, and an email was sent to the workers requesting their

participation and detailing what the interview was about and the informant's rights. Seeking the informant's permission before the interview was the most ethical and practical way of finding suitable informants as the social counsellors work different shifts and is not easy to meet them all at the same time. Although not all informants who were asked to participate availed themselves, there were six informants who agreed to participate in the interview. The informants had previous experiences in social work fields hence had the information needed.

6. Data analysis

In order to generate findings that transform raw data into new knowledge, a qualitative researcher must engage in active and demanding analytic process throughout all phases of the research. Understanding this process is therefore an important aspect not only of doing qualitative research but also reading, understanding and interpreting it. The researcher should understand that the field notes and transcriptions of tapes are not really 'facts' but results of the researcher's observation and participation in the interview. The interviewer is a co-author in the conclusions of the interviewee, the case of the interview are co-determined by the person asking leading and follow-up questions. kvale & Brickman (2009).

When the method of data collection is thought of well in advance, it helps in guiding the whole interview process. This helps to direct the interview process into the wished direction by bringing out the relevant questions in the interview. The findings are thus processed while the interview is taking place, thus the final transcription has more relevant information and are easier to analyse. However the transcriptions should not be mistaken as the data, since they are notes of the conversations held during the interviews and such already hold meanings and interpretations.

The idea plan was presented in August 2009, at the monthly thesis workshop, In August 2010 the thesis plan was presented to the lecturers and to an audience of other student groups, where feedback was received about the thesis plan. After which key concepts were revised and redefined as well as other areas of the thesis amended.

In November 2010, the plan was presented to the manager in charge of the home and the permission requests to conduct the interviews, were sent to the manager of the home and the workers. A copy of the thesis plan was attached to the letter. The plan included 2 themed questions, and participation was voluntarily. Some requests were made in person while others were made through E-mails.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed in November 2010, thus the transcription became the data used in this study. After the interviews were transcribed the concepts which emerged were structured and categorized where several themes and sub-themes were produced, such as daily needs of minor refugees, developing networks and professional development. Data was then linked to the theoretical background by describing the produced phenomena from the findings and its relation with the literature. The participants were given different names in order not to disclose their identity. It was after, placing the data into various themes that the findings began to become clearer.

The themes were derived from the data collected. The data was approached with specific questions in mind which were coded around. Many of the themes were coded initially, and then divided to sub-themes. Some of the initial themes were used to form sub themes while others were discarded, since they did not have enough data to support them. This method was chosen as it is relatively easy and quick method to learn and do. It can generate anticipated insight. Boyatzis,(1998)

7. Findings

7.1 Safety and security

In responding to a question concerning minor's needs most informants were of the opinion that minor refugees need an environment where they can feel safe, protected from harm. They all agreed that the group home had made necessary effort to ensure that the minors in the home feel safe and part of the family home, however, it was not possible to protect the minors from the outside world. There is little that a social counsellor could do to determine how each child is received by the public.

'While the minors are here, of course we make them feel at home, spend time with them, play games with them, but once they go to the public places such as Helsinki, or Sello we have no control of how the public reacts to them' **Informant C**

Another informant acknowledged that the minor refugees need living arrangements made for them, their health (especially in winter and education taken care of.)

'Someone has to take the responsibility of a care giver, to ensure that the minors like any other child receive their basic needs, I consider them first as minors, then as immigrants.' **Informant A**

The theme of supporting minor's needs had most informants sighting that they use dialogue as a tool for building a good client worker relationship. Observing the minors from the time they enter the home and observing the little progresses they make enables one to understand them more, and putting their background into consideration, makes the process of integration easy. During the house meetings, the minors are given room to voice their needs and give suggestions and opinions on how they would like to see things done in the home. The social counsellors admitted that they make an effort to ensure that the minors have available all necessary clothing during the changing weathers.

7.2 Social skills

Two informants admitted to using their past experiences to teach the minors practical issues concerning issues such as Finish policies, taxes, municipality governance, democracy and social systems. This issue may be considered common for people living in developed countries but may be considered as new concepts for people from failed or collapsed governance such as Somali, Sudan, Iraq and Iran. However, it is essential in conveying this point to be sensitive and use tact based on what the child may or may not know. One informant stated the need to teach minors concepts such as how to keep off illegal behaviours or other wrong doings.

'The minors, having come from different backgrounds, would need to be taught what is ok to do in Finland and what should not be done' **Informant D**

'The minors have various beliefs and backgrounds , using multicultural skill makes it easy to make them open up.'

7.3 Development of networks

The informants were of the opinion that school attendance played a big role in integrating the minors in the Finish society. The teachers in Finish school are very effective in making minors feel part of the society, through the learning of necessary skills such as the Finish language, having friends and confidants, feeling safe and finding activities with which to become involved. Social counsellors stated that when minors get involved in hobbies that they like such as football clubs, gym, swimming, it enables them to build social networks so that they do not feel isolated.

‘When the minors get involved in hobbies such as football and swimming, they meet people from their countries and other ethnicities hence develop their networks. This enables them to understand other cultures and open up not just to minors from their countries but minors from other countries too.’ Informant B

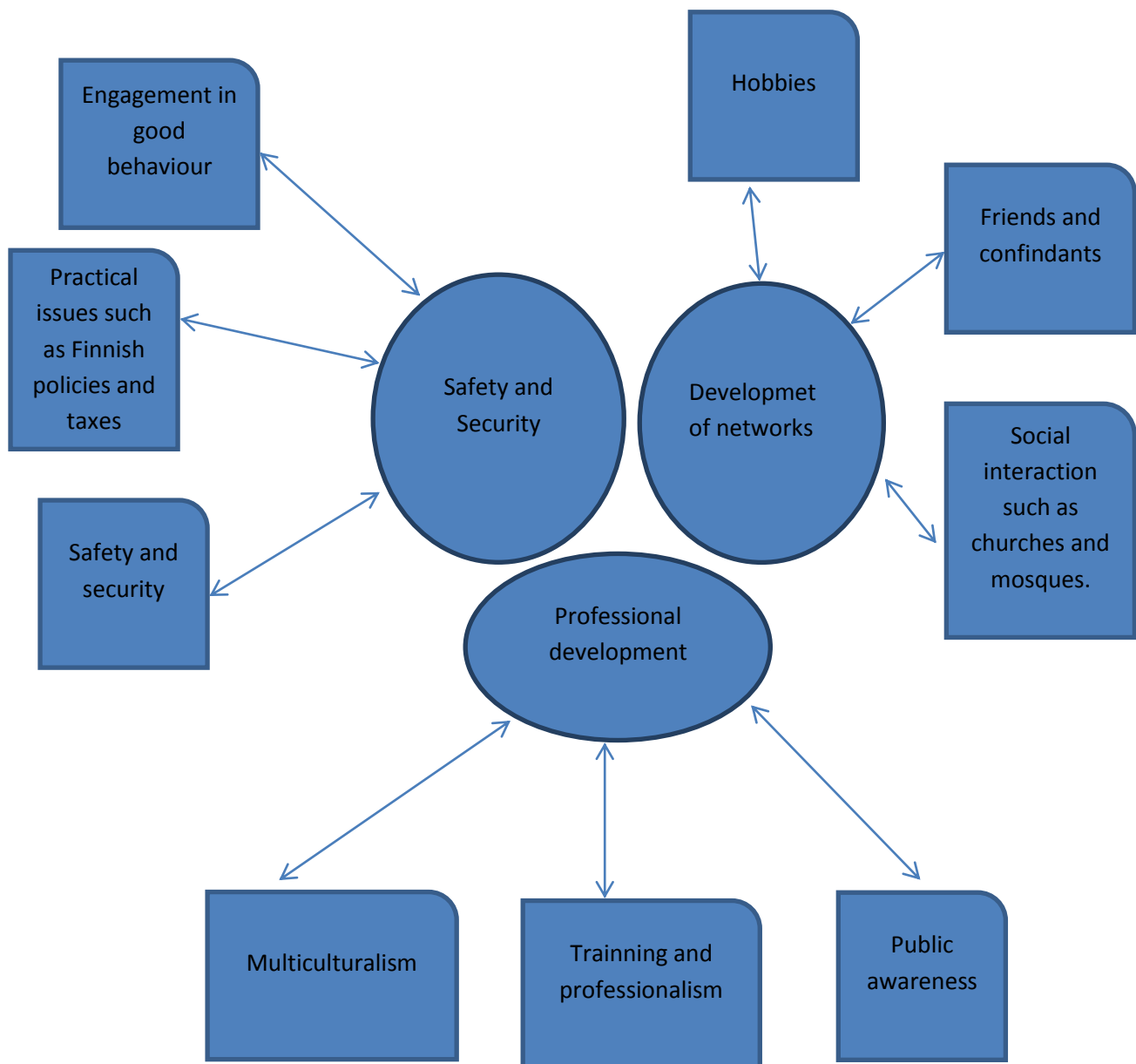
7.4 Professional Development

Most of the informants were content by the fact that the family home had organised trainings and workshops for them on several occasions, but were discontent about the information provided in the workshops. A lot of the information given at the workshops was familiar to the informants and that the trainings did not reflect enough on the current realities of their daily work.

‘Every day is different work day here, when you come to work you never know what to expect, its full of surprises.’ Informant C

‘It would be nice to watch social counsellors working under some form of general guideline, because sometimes it’s a bit too much for the minors, when every worker has his own style of handling issues, the minors end up being confused.’ Informant B

Figure III: ANALYSIS PROCESS WITH THEMES



8. Reflection of the research process

8.1 Ethical considerations

In this bachelor thesis process, the general codes of ethics and the Laurea thesis guidelines (2007) and Laurea code of research ethics (2007) were taken into consideration. Ethical concern in social research is increasingly perceived as a cornerstone of social science research in dealing with the rules and principles of how to conduct a research. Often qualitative research handles very sensitive and intimate issues concerning the informant's lives.

According to Kvale (1996), Ethics in social research should be considered throughout the research process, due to the terms standing for the interest of all participants who take part in the research. Therefore the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewee and protection of the subject's privacy should be followed throughout the research process. Kvale(1996). Since a small number of informants participated in this study, their identity was protected by removing all referral to personal background information. The concepts of honesty, openness, empathy, sensitivity, respectfulness and engaging the client are essential ingredients in producing a good quality research.

A letter of request for participation in this study along with the themed question and an attachment of the study plan were distributed to the informants via e-mail. The request letter contained the researcher's and the tutors contact information in case they needed further assistance understanding the plan and the research questions. The informants were assured that the data would be destroyed after being analysed and used in the study. Before the interview was done, we went through the consent letter to ensure that the informant understood their rights. Berg, (2007, 71). The ethical principle of autonomy claims that individuals should be given the liberty to make decisions without influence by others.

The reliability of this research may have been affected by ambulatory events such as movement of people during the interviewing process and telephone interruptions that were urgent and had to be responded to. The differences between each interviewee and myself were evident during the interview, considering English was a second or a third language to some of them. Having worked part time in the home before also made some aspects of the interview clearer as had observed the counsellors work. Having worked part-time in Kivenlahti family home and not having so much information about the home gave me a fresh perspective when looking at the Finnish system and context, thus I embarked on the research with relatively few preconceived notions and assumption on the issues.

Transferability allows someone other than the researcher to determine whether the findings of the study are applicable in another context or setting. This is accomplished by providing a detailed data base and thick description, a description that enumerates everything that another would need to know to comprehend the researcher's conclusions. This means that the descriptive data should provide the widest possible range of information for inclusion in the thick description. Talbot(1995). In this research previous studies and findings done by other researchers were taken into consideration. Informants were prompted to illustrate and expand their initial responses. I also ensured that the interview process is sufficiently long for subjects to be explained in depth.

9. Discussions

The purpose of the study was to look at social counsellors experiences as an important aspect in the lives of the minors and to improve the support for the minor refugees. The qualitative research process consisted of carrying out semi-structured interviews and analysing the data using qualitative content analysis. Thematic analysis allowed for the construction of general themes based on specific data resulting from the findings. All the informants of this study have worked in social work fields and in Kivenlahti family home for a period of 1-3 years. The settings of the interviews were relaxed, comfortable and private. Therefore the informants felt easy to talk about their personal experiences.

Previous work experience was considered as an important aspect among social counsellors while working with minor refugees. The best interest of the minors was considered important, based on the fact that their demands are sensitive due to their vulnerability. The public needs to be made aware of minor refugee issues in order to ensure their security while in the public places. Minor refugees should not be treated as refugees; instead they should be treated according to their needs and their background. The minor refugees should first be seen as children, then as migrants. The informants expressed that working in other fields of social work and traveling gave them experience on how to deal with multicultural clients.

The informants also expressed the need for the minors to have networks by joining hobby clubs such as football, swimming clubs, friends and confidants. This helps the minors through the integration process. The work description of a social counsellor in Kivenlahti family group home was considered as routine and one that did not have a formula. Every day came with different experiences and demanded that a social counsellor use common sense, wisdom and professionalism while dealing with different situations that come up during the shift.

Social counsellors were seen to function well at work when they know and understand different cultures in relation to their experience, human conditions, cultural care values and beliefs. They ought to be culturally prepared to be effective and beneficial to their clients. They should guide clients thinking and actions by sharing essential information that bring change to the lives of the clients. The social counsellors should be well informed and have access to the partners and know where to guide the clients. They should be able to help them develop their capacity for intelligent judgement and action by supplying them with methods, tools, techniques and training to improve their programs through the use of empowerment. Fetterman & Wanderman (2005)

The informants mentioned that their love for children motivated them to come to work. Having a good relationship with the minors makes it easy to deal with them and the work environment becomes more fun when the clients are happy. Building a good relationship with the minors makes it easier to understand their needs. Knowing the history of the client and

being able to make an assessment of the client makes it possible to understand the client's point of view. Mainly the assessment always involves observing the behaviour of the client, how they relate to others, their performance at school, how they spend their leisure time, how they obey the set rules, their ability to adapt to the new society, their interest in learning the language and the different progress they make on a daily basis. The minors should be supported in upholding their religions, cultural and social values in their accommodations are particularly important. The minors being allowed to speak their native language, interacting with adults or family members from their country of origin, or attending mosque provides the minors with a sense of self-assurance. Empowerment is an on-going process, which should be incorporated in the daily relationship between the worker and the client. For improvement to occur in a client's life, there has to be honesty, meaning the limitations that the client is facing are discussed in an honest manner, this helps build the client-partner relationship, and may involve documentation of a client's progress, hence the process of achieving the desired outcome. Fetterman & Wanderman (2005:31)

It is unlikely for individuals to complete the decision-making process alone. The informants also mentioned that the relationship that they have amongst themselves as workers plays a big role in creating a good working environment. The workers being able to act in professional manner and being creative in their dealings with the minors would be important for the wellbeing of the client. Avoiding routine and thinking outside the box would require team support. The workers should be in a position to support each other's ideas. It is important to have a clear organisational object and a clear vision which is understood by all the workers in the home. This would prevent situations whereby every worker sets his own rules hence the minors are left confused, which rule to follow.

'Empowerment involves a complex understanding of how power is exercised and how it affects client, but also how they exercise and create their own power.' Fook (2002,103). The minors attending school was seen as the best means to acquire the skills, competence and social behaviour that will help them integrate into the Finnish society and hence gain the power to be independent.

According to the data gathered, the Kivenlahti family group home workers receive periodic trainings occasionally, and the informants spoke of the benefits they got from those trainings, however, they felt that the contents of the training was not adequately supported as the social counsellors had their own style of work. It was suggested that the social counsellors be consulted on the contents of the trainings to as to help reflect in the practical realities of the daily happenings in Kivenlahti family group home. The social counsellors felt that they would be able to develop their work if they got feedback both from their employers and from the clients.

This study brought out several issues but it was not possible to discuss all of them as only six informants were interviewed and it is not possible to draw large-scale conclusions on experiences of social counsellors on the basis of this study. Thus a further research with a larger sample of social counsellors from other family group homes would be needed. Looking into comparative information on the experiences of social counsellors working with minors in other family group homes would be beneficial for establishing common standard of representation

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Appendix 1

PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

Dear Participant,

I am Daisy Omondi, a final year student at Laurea university of Applied Sciences, undertaking a degree course in Social Services. Am doing my bachelor thesis and would like to ask for your participation..

My interest is to find out your experiences in the field and ways in which the needs of minor refugees are met.

Topics to be covered in the study are:

- The needs of minor refugees
- The experiences of social counsellors working with minor refugees.

For the purpose of collecting data, am hoping to interview 5-10 social counsellors that work in Kivenlahti family group home. Participation in the interview will be voluntarily. All data will be analysed and published anonymously.

Writing this thesis is part of my Bachelor Curriculum. However, am hoping to provide useful information for all parties. The interview will be taking place within November 2010. The interview will be done in English or Finnish. My tutors for this research are Ossi Salin and Hillevi Ukkola, and their contacts are available below. We are available for more information regarding this study.

Thank you for your cooperation!

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Appendix 2

CONSENT FORM

Participation Agreement

I _____, agree to take part in the interview on social counselors experiences in empowering minor refugees.

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntarily. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If for any reason, at a time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give explanation.

The data gathered in this study are confidential and my identity will be protected in the final study.

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the interviewers.

I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference. I have read the above form and, with the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate on today's interview.

Date

Participant's signature

Interviewer's signature

Interviewee's signature

Appendix 3

Interview guide.

- What are the needs of minor refugees and how do you identify those needs?
- In what ways do you support minor's needs in your daily work?

Appendix 4

Figure 1: The counselling model

Figure 2: Themes used in the data.